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## EXPRESS BUSINESS ON INTERURBAN LINES

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There still exists a great diversity of opinion among electric railway operators regarding the correct method of handling express and freight by electric power.

Ten years ago, very few electric railways were engaged in freight and express traffic and the question then was: Shall we engage in the freight and express traffic? The field was entered into with considerable indifference on the part of some managers. The situation, however, has undergone a rapid change and nearly all interurban railways now count on the revenue from freight and express traffic as a substantial part of their gross earnings. A statement recently prepared, shows that of thirty-nine electric railways reporting concerning the matter, the percentage of gross earnings derived from freight and express traffic amounted to from 1.5 per cent to 48.5 per cent, aggregating each company from \$1,489 to \$162,904 per year.

So far as my personal knowledge is concerned, I know of few, if any, interurban railways that are not at the present time engaged in freight and express traffic. While it has apparently been decided that the handling of freight and express is remunerative, the question as to what is the proper method still remains a point on which a great difference of opinion exists. There are many strong arguments in favor of all methods advocated.

I do not believe a general rule can be recommended or adopted as to whether interurban electric railways can handle freight or express. It appears to be a matter which is controlled entirely by local conditions; especially as regards competition, traffic to be handled, etc.

Since the topic of this paper is "Express on Interurban Lines," it would be out of place to go into a lengthy discussion as to whether

it is more desirable and remunerative to handle freight. Experience has proven beyond a doubt that there are conditions and circumstances favorable for the development of freight traffic.

It might be well at this point to distinguish clearly between freight and express traffic. Freight traffic in this particular connection includes all commodities moved or transported by electric railways, from place to place; such traffic can be handled in car load lots, or less than car load lots. The rates charged for such transportation are known as freight rates and are usually governed by an official classification; such rates cover only the transportation charge and possibly a terminal charge, but do not provide for a wagon pick-up at point of shipment or delivery at destination.

Express traffic may consist of shipments of any commodity or of merchandise, but it is usually composed of a higher class of shipments, or merchandise, than are handled by freight, and for which faster time is desired, or absolutely required. Express rates not only cover the transportation charge but provide for a pick-up and delivery at point of shipment and destination. While a number of electric railways advertise "Express service at freight rates," a real express service is not usually given, with the exception that the running time from point of shipment to destination, is as fast as in the express service. No provision is made for a wagon service. Express rates usually consist of a standard merchandise rate per hundred pounds, covering all commodities, with certain exceptions which are provided for in the express classification. A general comparison of freight and express rates cannot well be made, as express rates will usually exceed ordinary freight rates from 15 to 200 per cent, according to distance; so it can be seen that a clear distinction is made between freight and express, when the rate is taken into consideration.

Coming down to the methods employed in handling the express traffic we find that several general classes of arrangements are in force. The three most common arrangements are: First, the lease of the express privilege to a good old-line express company on a percentage of income, or a stated amount per ton basis; second, an independent express service handled and conducted entirely by the electric railway; third, a mixed service usually conducted by the railway and operated in conjunction with the freight business. A

great majority of electric railways conduct their freight business themselves as part of their regular business.

Of thirty-nine electric railways recently reporting upon the matter of express traffic it was found that twelve had arrangements with old-line express companies to handle the express traffic over their lines on a percentage or tonnage basis, and eight companies maintained an express department, with wagon service run as a local proposition. The twelve companies having arrangements with old-line express companies also handled freight traffic.

There are a number of arguments in favor of an arrangement with an old-line express company, to handle the express traffic. In the first place it opens up a wide field to an electric railway by making it possible to participate in handling through traffic, that would not or could not be handled on two local rates. Under an arrangement of this kind the old-line express company provides agents, wagons and horses at its own expense, leaving nothing for the railway to do except to transport the express matter. This can usually be accomplished with small cost unless special cars are required, which is seldom the case. This arrangement, moreover, does not hinder or complicate the development or handling of freight traffic.

There are conditions, however, that make it desirable for an electric railway to conduct, maintain and operate its own express department. It is absolutely necessary in order to make an independent service a commercial success, that the company serve a thickly populated territory and have one terminal located in a large city. Without these the amount of strictly express traffic moving would not be sufficient to warrant the expense of such a service. The maintenance of horses and wagons in connection with this service is, of necessity, a serious consideration, and such a service can only be successfully operated when local conditions are favorable.

Another method which has proven successful consists of a compromise service, with rates so arranged that three grades of service are optional with shippers and consignees: (1) whether goods are to be forwarded subject to rates providing for pick-up service at point of shipment and delivery at destination, (2) or wagon service at point of shipment or destination, (3) or simply transportation without wagon service.

Other companies have adopted the plan of handling freight traffic, but at a higher rate than charged by competing steam roads and eliminating the heavier and lower class commodities.

In conclusion it can be stated that practically all interurban railways handling freight and express, under whatever system they have adopted, find it remunerative. Any company which is considering the inauguration of an express service should first make a careful study of the local situation and secure the opinion of an experienced yet unbiased person as to whether it is advisable to enter the field, and whether to handle freight traffic only and lease the express privilege to an old-line express company, or to organize an express department and handle such traffic as a part of the organization.